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# Determiners, Nouns, or What? Problems in the Analysis of Some Commonly Occurring Forms in Philippine Languages<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence A. Reid

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII<sup>1</sup>

This paper deals with the problems inherent in determining the syntactic word class of the initial word in many common noun phrases in Philippine languages such as Tagalog *ang*, Ilokano *ti*, and Bontok *nan*. These forms have been variously called case-marking particles, construction markers, common noun markers, articles, determiners, specifiers, or simply proclitics. However, a good syntactic typology of the languages requires that a decision be made as to their word class, based not simply on functional characteristics, semantic features, or translation equivalents, but on their syntactic distribution. Under certain assumptions, these words would be determiners, with the immediately following word being the head noun of its phrase. However, the words that follow appear to be verbal, having the same form as in the predicate of a sentence, and this paper thus considers an alternative solution in which the words in question are specifying-nouns meaning 'the one' and are the heads of their phrases. Under this analysis, the immediately following words are verbal constructions that constitute relative clauses dependent on the specifying nouns. Corroborating evidence is found in the Talubin dialect of Bontok, in which the words in question require genitive clitics to be attached to them, rather than to an immediately following content word. Historical evidence showing that the forms in question were originally demonstrative nouns (and still function as such) supports their synchronic analysis as nouns.

**1. INTRODUCTION.** Philippine languages and many of the Austronesian languages of Formosa and elsewhere characteristically have noun phrases that begin with one of a number of typically monosyllabic forms, exemplified by the well-known Tagalog forms *ang*, *ng* /*nan*/, and *sa*; Ilokano *ti*, *iti*; Bontok *nan*, *ʔas*, *ʔad*, and so forth, each of which introduces a common noun phrase with distinctive case marking, as in (1)–(3).<sup>2</sup>

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1. I would like to thank Hsiu-chuan Liao for her help in tracking down many of the references cited in this paper, and I would also like to express my appreciation to her and to William O'Grady for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of the paper. I am indebted to Alex François for directing me to the publications of Lemaréchal on Tagalog.

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|---|--|
| (1) Tagalog<br>pumások ang babáe.<br>entered ANG woman<br>'The woman entered.'                | (2) Ilokano<br>immáy ti áso.<br>came TI dog<br>'The dog came.' |
| (3) Bontok<br>linmayáw nan gayyám=ku.<br>ran.away NAN friend=1S. GEN<br>'My friend ran away.' |  |

While the word that usually follows this initial form is normally identified as a noun, the initial form has received a bewildering array of labels in the literature on Philippine languages. This paper is an attempt to examine some of the synchronic and diachronic facts about these forms in order to determine in a principled way what their appropriate syntactic category is.

**2. PREVIOUS CHARACTERIZATIONS.** A survey of the literature on Philippine languages provides a great deal of information about the nature of the forms we are examining. They are typically translated as articles in English, and sometimes as prepositions, so it is not surprising that they are sometimes named as such in the literature: "articles" (Scheerer 1905:107; Vanoverbergh 1955:41; Lambrecht 1978:vii); "prepositions" (Akamine 1996:46).

In common with much other linguistic literature from Pāṇini onward (Lyons 1969:20), short, uninflectable forms such as these that do not fit neatly into any other part of speech have often simply been labeled as "particles" (McKaughan and Meiklejohn 1954:240; Forster 1964:36; Lee 1964:50; McKaughan and Macaraya 1967:x; Wolff and Wolff 1967:Lesson 3; Brichoux and Brichoux 1977:167; Rosaldo 1971:292); "article-like particles" (Lambrecht 1978:vii); "prepositional particles" (Akamine 1996:46).

Most authors, however, attempt to provide some indication of the distribution or function of the form in the label that they provide. They note that they begin the phrase: "introducing particles" (Hussey 1965:42); "phrase introducers" (Wolfenden 1971:62); or that they mark the following constituent as a noun or noun phrase: "marking particles" (DuBois 1976:39; Post 1992:xvii; Barlaan 1999:54); "noun-marking particles" (Headland and Headland 1974:xxx), "noun markers" (Johnston 1975:50); "nominal markers" (Brainard 1985:122); "phrase marking particles" (Porter 1979:39); "noun phrase markers" (Hussey 1966:35; Kerr 1988:46). Other authors note that the forms have something to do with identifying the construction of which they are a constituent: "construction identifiers" (Ehrman 1969); "construction markers" (Reid 1978; Yamashita 1992:21); of orienting the noun phrase to the construction: "orientors" (Maryott 1963:54); or of

2. Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: 1s, first person singular; 2s, second person singular; 3s, third person singular; dfnt, definite; dmns, demonstrative; NEG, negative; ntrg, interrogative; plrl, plural; prdc, predicate; prnn, pronoun; rltv, relative; sttv, stative; xtns, extension; Det, Determiner; Gen, Genitive; LIG, ligature; N, Noun; Nom, Nominative; P, Preposition; V, Verb; TPLK, topic linker. Examples not otherwise labeled are from my own work.

tying the noun phrase into the construction of which it is a part: “ligatures” (Newell 1958:110; Healey 1960:89).

Many note that the forms seem to have grammatical function, “function marker” (de la Cruz and Zorc 1968:149; Hidalgo and Hidalgo 1971:44); “grammatical markers” (Mintz 1971:7); or that they indicate some kind of syntactic relation: “determinants of relations” (Asai 1936:41); “relators (a kind of particle)” (Shetler 1976:127–128); “relation markers” (Reid 1966; Ramos 1971:51); “substantive relational markers” (Svelmoe and Svelmoe 1974:45); “relational (nominalizing) particles” (Abrams 1970:5).

Probably the most common description of these forms is one that identifies them as marking the case of the noun phrase of which they are a part: “case-marking particles” (Benton 1971:47; Forman 1971:52; Antworth 1979:6; Bell 1976:5; Zorc 1977:81; Lambrecht 1978:vii; Kamp and Kamp 1986:46; Mayfield 1987:117), “nominal case marking particles” (Miller and Miller 1976:66); “case markers” (Brainard 1985:123; Ho 1990:102; Fukuda 1997:47); “topic/goal-markers” (Barbian 1977:83).

A few authors have classified the forms into a syntactic word class called “determiner” (Mirikitani 1972:119–120; Reid 1978:38; Gieser 1987:122; Newell 1993:13; Starosta 2000:32; Reid and Liao 2001:64).

**3. PROBLEMS.** While it is true that in examples such as (1)–(3), the form in question introduces the Nominative noun phrase of each sentence,<sup>3</sup> its characterization as a case marker is probably not appropriate, in that the same form can also be used to introduce a predicate noun, as in (4)–(6), as well as a fronted, topicalized noun, as in (7)–(9). In most Philippine languages, Nominative noun phrases are not morphologically marked, except when expressed as a pronoun. Word order alone typically marks Nominative full noun phrases.

- (4) Tagalog  
 ang babáe ang pumások.  
 ANG woman ANG entered  
 ‘The one who entered was the woman.’

- (5) Ilokano  
 ti áso ti immáy.  
 TI dog TI came  
 ‘The one that came was the dog.’

- (6) Bontok  
 nan gayyám=ku nan linmayáw.  
 NAN friend=1S.GEN NAN ran.away  
 ‘The one who ran away was my friend.’

3. I use the general term Nominative rather than Absolutive, even though I consider these languages to be ergative, because the syntactic characteristics of such phrases are identical—in both transitive and intransitive sentences—with those in accusative languages.

## (7) Tagalog

ang babáe, ay pumások.

ANG woman TP.LK entered

'As for the woman, she entered.'

## (8) Ilokano

ti áso ket immáy.

TI dog TP.LK came

'As for the dog, it came.'

## (9) Bontok

nan gayyəm=ku, linmayáw.

NAN friend=1S.GEN ran.away

'As for your friend, she ran away.'

But the main problem with most of the labels given above is that they are functional: they label the meaning of the form or specify one or more of its syntactic characteristics, but they do not specify the syntactic word class, or category, of the forms in question. I subscribe to a lexicalist theory of language that claims that every word in a language carries a feature that marks it as belonging to one of a limited, probably universal set of distributional classes,<sup>4</sup> among which are noun, verb, adjective, adverb, determiner, and preposition, not all of which, however, are necessarily present in a given language—although probably all languages distinguish at least nouns and verbs. These are not form classes, dependent on their morphological shape, nor on meaning or function, but are defined purely in terms of their distribution within a sentence and their possible cooccurrence potential with other categories. One of the characteristics of the class of determiners universally is that they are dependents of head nouns, and typically occur at the outer edge of a noun phrase. They cannot themselves be modified by any other form.<sup>5</sup> They often agree with semantic features of the head noun, such as definiteness, specificity, common vs. personal, plurality, and so forth, and may also agree with or "mark" the syntactic case of their head noun.

Based on these facts about determiners, it seems that the forms we are discussing are, in fact, determiners, in that they have precisely the distributional characteristics described above and function in ways consistent with what is known about determiners in other languages of the world.

**3.1 PROBLEM WITH TYPOLOGY.** The first hint that there may be something wrong with their classification as determiners comes when we consider the typological characteristics of Philippine languages. They are strongly right-branching, with dependents typically occurring to the right of their head. Thus complement clauses always occur to the right of the verb upon which they are

4. The theory developed and described in Starosta 2000.

5. Starosta defines determiner as "a radically endocentric word class in that it takes no dependents of its own. It is similar to an Adjective in only occurring as a dependent of a noun, but special in that it always occurs at the left or right end of a sequence of N dependents." (Starosta 2000:30)

dependent, and relative clauses and genitively marked possessive noun phrases always occur to the right of their head nouns. Determiners, however, are typologically anomalous in that they always occur to the left of their head noun.<sup>6</sup>

**3.2 PROBLEM WITH PHRASE HEADS.** The second hint that there may be a problem with considering the forms as determiners comes when we consider the class of the forms that immediately follow them, forms that typologically would be expected to be head nouns, if the initial form is a determiner.

**3.2.1 Supposed determiner followed by a lexical verb.** There is little question that if we consider only sentences such as those given in (1–3), the following form is a noun and it is the head of its phrase, a noun phrase. However, in (4–6) the word that appears to be the head of the noun phrase in the second half of each sentence carries affixation that identifies it as a verb. Two explanations for this have appeared in the literature. Theories that require that the head of a noun phrase be a noun have assumed that these verb look-alike forms are actually zero-derived deverbal nominalizations, similar to the effect of *-er* nominalizations in English, such as *singer*, *teacher*, and so forth, hence their translations in the above examples as ‘the one who ...’. The other explanation is given by linguists who allow deletion transformations in their theory. They claim (see, for example, Kroeger 1998:2, 11) that the forms are verbs, as they appear to be, but are the predicates of headless relative clauses, so that, in effect, the noun phrases in which they appear are—on the surface at least—headless.

The latter explanation is not available to a linguist such as myself, who rejects transformations and underlying structures, and for whom there is no such thing as a headless relative clause, or a noun phrase without a head noun.

**3.2.2 Supposed determiner followed by an auxiliary verb.** The explanation that the verb-like forms after a supposed determiner are zero-derived deverbal nominalizations runs into problems when one considers other examples in which an auxiliary verb appears to immediately follow the supposed determiner, as in (10)–(13), in which a negative auxiliary occurs.

- (10) Tagalog (Schachter and Otnes 1972:518)  
 ang hindi matatalino ang tinuturuan=niya.  
 ANG NEG intelligent ANG teaches=GEN.3S  
 ‘The ones he teaches are the unintelligent ones.’

6. There are some Philippine languages such as Ivatan, the Alta and Agta languages on the northeastern coast of Luzon, Isinai, and Kagayanen Manobo, however, that do have what are probably true enclitic determiners occurring at the righthand edge of the noun phrase, in addition to the phrase-initial forms of the kind we are discussing in this paper.

(11) Tagalog (Jose Rizal)<sup>7</sup>

ang hindi magmahál sa sarili=ng wikà,  
 ANG NEG love SA self=LIG language

ay higít pa ang amóy sa mabáho=ng isdà.  
 TP.LK over yet ANG smell SA stinking=LIG fish

'As for the one who doesn't love his language, he is worse than the stench of rotting fish.'

## (12) Ilokano (Vanoverbergh 1955:246)

asíno ti di agayát?  
 who TI NEG glad

'Who won't be glad?'

## (13) Bontok

sakʔən nan ʔadí ʔumáy.  
 PRDC.IS NAN NEG go

'The one who won't go is me.'

Even more problematic are examples from languages such as Bontok, in which a sequence of auxiliary verbs (*ʔasá* 'future', *ʔí* 'motion away') may appear following the supposed determiner and preceding the main lexical verb, because each of these would also, in turn, have to be considered nominalizations, as in (14).

## (14) Bontok

ʔintu nan ʔasá=k ʔí ʔumalʔan si tápəy?  
 where NAN will.GEN.IS go get.at SI rice.beer

'Where will I go to get rice beer?'

I consider the first in a series of auxiliary verbs to be the head of its construction, and any following auxiliary verb and the main lexical verb to be its dependents, so that if the phrase is a noun phrase with an initial determiner, the auxiliary would have to be considered a noun. While it might be possible to consider the lexical verbs as nominalizations when they follow a determiner, it is unlikely that negative, modal, directional, and similar auxiliary verbs are nominalizations. To my knowledge, there are no languages that have nominalized auxiliary verbs.

**3.2.3 Supposed determiner followed by an existential verb.** Just as problematic are examples such as (15), in which an existential verb appears immediately following the supposed determiner.

## (15) Tagalog (Ramos 1971:113)

ang babáe ang may asáwa.  
 ANG woman ANG exist spouse

'The one who has a spouse is the woman.'

7. Sheila Zamar, pers. comm.

**3.2.4 Supposed determiner followed by a preposition.** A similar problem arises with constructions such as (16)–(17), in which what is probably a prepositional phrase immediately follows a supposed determiner.

- (16) Tagalog (Lemaréchal 1982:21)  
 ang pára sa bátà  
 ANG for SA child  
 ‘the one that is for the child’
- (17) Kapampangan (Mirikitani 1972:135–136)  
 ing para king anak=ku ing libru.  
 ING for KING child=GEN.IS ING book  
 ‘The book is the one that is for my child.’

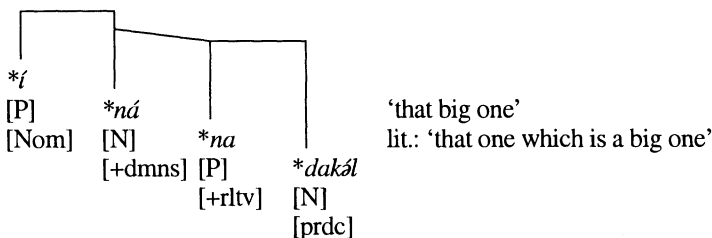
Because prepositional phrases are headed by prepositions, it would be necessary to analyze the preposition as a nominalization, if the phrase is a noun phrase and the initial form is a determiner, a solution that is not palatable.

**3.2.5 Supposed determiner followed by a case-marked NP.** In (18), a noun phrase, locatively marked by *sa*, immediately follows the supposed determiner, as part of a Nominative noun phrase. Without any noun immediately after the determiner on which the Locative noun phrase can be dependent, we are left with the anomolous situation of a noun phrase that is both nominatively and locatively marked.

- (18) Tagalog (Ramos 1971:113)  
 ang karnabál ang sa báyan.  
 ANG carnival ANG SA town  
 ‘The one that will be in town is the carnival.’

**4. A SOLUTION.** In Reid (2000:38–40), I attempted to provide an explanation for the historical processes by which determiners in Philippine languages developed from a proposed Proto–Extra-Formosan noun phrase structure such as that shown in (19) with a dependency stemma attached.<sup>8</sup>

- (19) Proto–Extra-Formosan ([7] in Reid 2000)

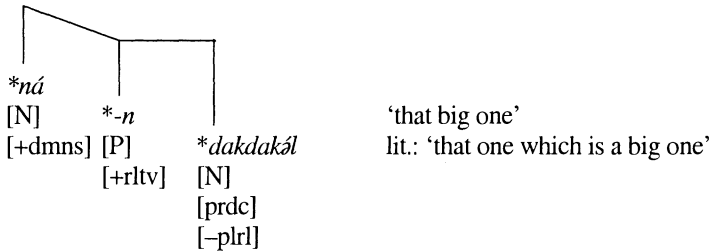


8. Horizontal lines show exocentric dependency relations, slanting lines show endocentric dependency relations.



I noted that “in some of the northern Philippine languages, such as those belonging to the Central Cordilleran subgroup, including Bontok, Kankanaey, and Ifugao, prepositions became postclitics to the preceding noun, with subsequent loss of the final vowel,” as in (20).

(20) Pre-Bontok ([8] in Reid 2000)



I claimed that “now, however, BON, KNK, IFG *nan* is no longer a sequence of noun + preposition. It has become grammaticalized as a single morpheme functioning as a definite determiner,” as in (21).

(21) Bontok ([9] in Reid 2000)



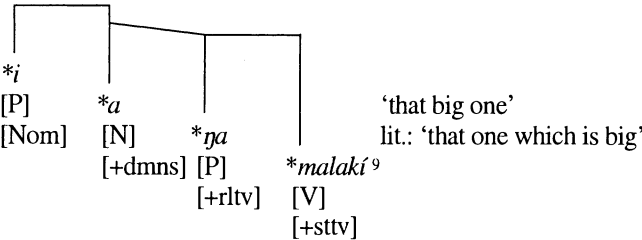
I then noted the way these processes had operated to produce the Tagalog determiners. “Precisely the same kinds of changes have operated to produce the well-known *an* and *nan* determiners found in Tagalog, except that there was an innovation in the form of the relative preposition (ligature) [i.e., the preposition that introduces relative clauses, commonly referred to in the literature as a “ligature”] *\*na*. The postconsonantal variant *\*a* was lost, and *\*na* was generalized to all positions. Subsequently, the initial nasal of *\*na* became a velar in postvocalic position (22). The relative preposition became a postclitic to the preceding noun, losing its final vowel (23), although a relic of the earlier stage remains frozen on the Tagalog plural determiner *man*. Nominative noun phrases lost their case-marking, and the demonstrative noun plus preposition sequence *\*a-ŋ* became a morphologically simple determiner *an* (24).”

Although the historical development just described appropriately captures the processes by which determiners developed, it assumes that the forms such as Bontok *nan* and Tagalog *ang* are in fact determiners, but as I have shown in the first sections of this paper, there are serious problems with the analysis of these forms in this way.

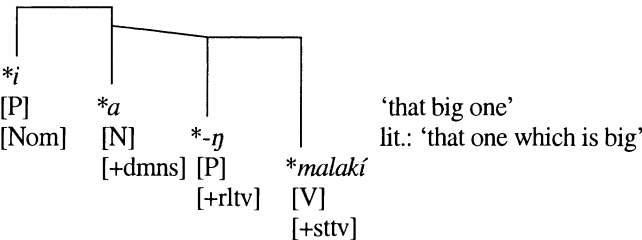
A comparison of the forms of relative clauses in Tagalog shown in (25) a–c alongside equivalent structures of the type we have been examining in (26) a–c suggests that the supposed determiner *ang* is still a noun *a* with a clitic ligature

=ng, followed by a relative clause. In Tagalog, the form of the ligature is *na* following a consonant; following a vowel, it is the clitic =ng.

(22) Pre-Tagalog ([I2] in Reid 2000)



(23) Pre-Tagalog ([I3] in Reid 2000)



(24) Tagalog ([I4] in Reid 2000)



(25) Tagalog (Lemaréchal 1982:21)

- a. karnabál na sa báyan  
carnival LIG SA town  
‘the carnival that is in town’
- b. relós na sa nánay  
watch LIG SA mother  
‘the watch that belongs to mother’
- c. relós na pára sa nánay  
watch LIG for SA mother  
‘the watch that is for mother’

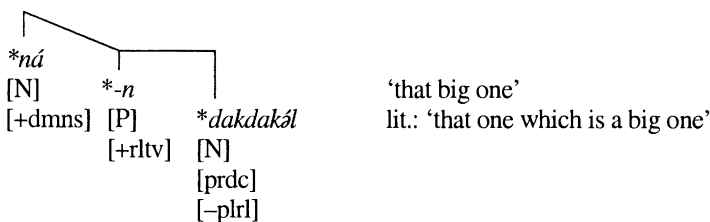
9. The analysis of *malakí* ‘big’ as a stative ([+sttv]) verb in Tagalog, rather than as a noun as in the Bontok examples above, is motivated by the presence in Tagalog of the stative verbal prefix *ma-* on the form. Following a determiner, however, it is analyzed as a deverbal noun, as in (24).

## (26) Tagalog (Lemaréchal 1982:21)

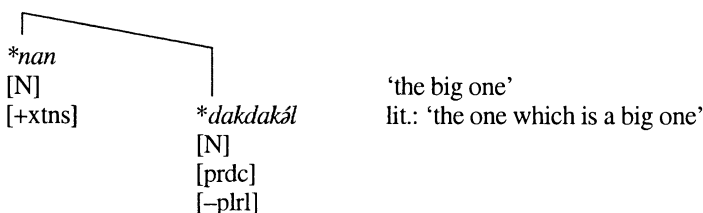
- a. ang sa báyan  
 ANG SA town  
 'the one that is in town'
- b. ang sa nánay  
 ANG SA mother  
 'the one that belongs to mother'
- c. ang pára sa nánay  
 ANG for SA mother  
 'the one that is for mother'

I believe now that my earlier explanation in Reid (2000) apparently went too far in claiming that what were originally demonstrative nouns followed by ligatures had become determiners in the modern languages. Before all lexical items, nouns, verbs, and prepositions as well, the supposed determiner is in fact still a noun, although no longer a demonstrative, and it is still the head of the noun phrase. As such, the lexical item that follows it is the predicate head of a relative clause, while what was originally the ligature has now become grammaticalized as part of the preceding noun. A form such as Bontok *nan*, although a noun, may not occur without a (following) dependent predicate. In this way, such forms are similar to verbal auxiliaries, typically grammaticalized from lexical verbs, which also require a following dependent predicate. Such forms are said to carry the feature [+extension] (Pagotto and Starosta 1985:51–52). Nouns that require a following relative clause, such as Bontok *nan*, are also claimed to carry the same feature and may be considered to be “auxiliary” nouns, as in (28).

## (27) Pre-Bontok ([8] in Reid 2000)



## (28) Bontok



An alternative analysis, that demonstratives have developed as extension nouns before verbs but have become determiners before nouns, removes the problem of “headless relative clauses,” but it still leaves an anomalous typological situation in those cases where they actually do occur before a noun. Although it may seem unlikely that every noun that occurs in a noun phrase beginning with a form such as TAG *ang* is actually a predicate noun—which would be the expected result of considering the supposed determiner to be itself the head noun of the phrase—it is just this analysis that is proposed by Lemaréchal (1983) for Tagalog nouns. He states that “*ang* indicates persons or things as individualized” (1983:410), and “even *ang doktor* is basically ‘the one being a doctor’” (1983:409). Moreover, evidence from the Talubin dialect of Bontok suggests that this is precisely the case. In this dialect, words ending in a high vowel (either *i* or *u*) have acquired a final consonant stop, either *-k* or *-ʔ*, with the result that earlier possessed nouns such as *ʔásu=k* ‘my dog’ became homophonous with the unpossessed innovated form *ʔásuk* ‘dog’. Apparently to avoid such cases of homophony, all genitive possessive pronouns now follow the initial *na* of the phrase, regardless of whether the following noun was originally vowel-final, as in (29)a–b, or consonant-final, as in (29)c. This development would be unlikely if the initial *na* were a determiner, because it would require that the determiner have a dependent genitive pronoun (a completely aberrant situation for determiners), but it would be likely if the initial *na* were still a noun. An alternative analysis is suggested by the English translations, that the forms *nak* ‘my’, *nam* ‘your’, *nána* ‘his’, and so forth, are possessive determiners, but such an analysis does not solve the other problems detailed in 3.2 in connection with the supposed determiners.

## (29) Talubin Bontok

- a. ʔuʔúd na=k ʔásuk?

where NA=GEN.IS dog

‘Where is my dog?’

- b. ʔuʔúd na=m ʔásuk?

where NA=GEN.2S dog

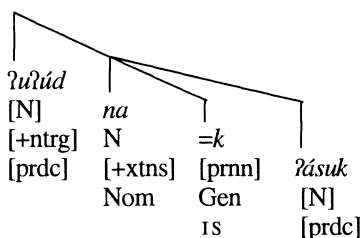
‘Where is your dog?’

- c. ʔuʔúd ná=na ʔávun?

where NA=GEN.3S house

‘Where is his house?’

## (30) Talubin Bontok



‘Where is my dog?’

**5. CONCLUSION.** This paper has attempted to provide evidence that the well-known monosyllabic forms that introduce common noun phrases in Philippine languages do not belong, at least in some cases, to the syntactic category of determiners, but to that of nouns. The evidence has consisted of fairly common occurrences of the forms before words that are themselves unlikely to be the heads of noun phrases, such as prepositions and auxiliary verbs, supported by the other evidence, such as their anomalous typological position in the phrase, and the presence of apparent dependents in at least Talubin Bontok, which would suggest that the forms are not determiners. Their analysis as a subclass of extension nouns, that is, nouns that require a dependent predicate, is consistent with analyses of non-Philippine languages in which such constructions occur, and adequately accounts for the problems that arise when they are analyzed as determiners.

In this paper, I have only discussed data that are found in Nominative noun phrase constructions. As noted early in the paper, such constructions are not morphologically case-marked in Philippine languages. However, other noun phrases, such as Genitives, Locatives, and—in some languages—Obliques are formally case-marked on the initial form of the phrase. It is probable that a careful analysis of these forms will show that they are also extension nouns, with morphological case-marking, but at this point the analysis has not been done.

A further question that arises is the status of the forms that introduce personal names, such as Tagalog *si*, *ni*, and *kay*. Whether these are determiners, nouns, or perhaps prepositions requires further research.

One additional point should be made here. The form of the Talubin Bontok construction given in (30) should be familiar to linguists who have worked with Oceanic languages. It is reminiscent of the Proto-Oceanic general possessive classifier construction, reconstructed by Pawley (1973) and Lichtenberk (1985) with “classifier” \*na followed by a Genitive clitic pronoun. Although the Talubin Bontok development is clearly a development independent from the one that resulted in the same type of construction in Proto-Oceanic, it is, however, suggestive that the source of the Proto-Oceanic general possessive classifier was the same extension noun, reconstructed as \*na, that occurs in Bontok and in many other Philippine languages, rather than a “preposed common article” as proposed by Ross (1988:98–100).

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